

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

Secret Diplomacy: The Historic Opening to China

1971

FROM: THE PREMIER OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA ①
(CHOU EN-LAI)
TO: PRESIDENT NIXON

Beijing, April 21, 1971

Premier Chou En-lai thanked [Pakistani] President Yahya for conveying the message of President Nixon on 5 January 1971. Premier Chou En-lai is very grateful to President Yahya and he will be grateful if President Yahya conveys the following verbatim to President Nixon:

"Owing to the situation of the time it has not been possible to reply earlier to the message from the President of the U.S.A. to the Premier of People's Republic of China.

"At present contacts between the peoples of China and the United States are being renewed. However, as the relations between China and the U.S.A. are to be restored fundamentally, a solution to this crucial question can be found only through direct discussions between high-level responsible persons of the two countries. Therefore, the Chinese Government reaffirms its willingness to receive publicly in Peking a special envoy of the President of the U.S. (for instance, Mr. Kissinger) or the U.S. Secretary of State or even the President of the U.S. himself for direct meeting and discussions. Of course, if the U.S. President considers that the time is not yet right the matter may be deferred to a later date. As for the modalities, procedure and other details of the high-level meeting and discussions in Peking, as they are of no substantive significance, it is believed that it is entirely possible for public arrangements to be made through the good office of President Yahya Khan."

EXCERPTS OF THE PRESIDENT'S NEWS CONFERENCE ②

Washington, April 29, 1971

Q. Mr. President, the Commission of the United Nations that you appointed, headed by your 1960 Vice Presidential running mate, has come out rather strongly for a two-China policy. The last time we saw you you weren't prepared to talk about that. I wonder if tonight you could say how you feel about those proposals.

The President: Well, Mr. Cormier, those recommendation by that very distinguished committee, of course, is being given consideration in the high councils of this Government, and I am, of

course, considering it along with recommendations which move in the other direction.

I think, however, that your question requires that I put, perhaps, in perspective much of this discussion about our new China policy. I think that some of the speculation that has occurred in recent weeks since the visit of the table tennis team to Peking has not been useful.

I want to set forth exactly what it is and what it is not.

First, as I stated at, I think one of my first press conferences in this room, the long-range goal of this administration is a normalization of our relationship with Mainland China, the People's Republic of China, and the ending of its isolation from the other nations of the world. That is a long-range goal.

Second, we have made some progress toward that goal. We have moved in the field of travel; we have moved in the field of trade. There will be more progress made.

For example, at the present time, I am circulating among the departments the items which may be released as possible trade items in the future and I will be making an announcement on that in a very few weeks.

But now when we move from the field of travel and trade to the field of recognition of the Government, to its admission to the United Nations, I am not going to discuss those matters, because it is premature to speculate about that.

We are considering all those problems. When I have an announcement to make, when a decision is made—and I have not made it yet—I will make it.

But up until that time we will consider all of the proposals that are being made. We will proceed on the path that we have been proceeding on. And that is the sensitive area by speculation that goes beyond what the progress might achieve.

I would just summarize it this way: What we have done has broken the ice. Now we have to test the water to see how deep it is.

I would finally suggest that—I know this question may come up if I don't answer it now—I hope, and as a matter of fact, I expect to visit Mainland China sometime in some capacity—I don't know what capacity. But that indicates what I hope for in the long term. And I hope to contribute to a policy in which we can have a new relationship with Mainland China. . . .

FROM: PRESIDENT NIXON

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TO: PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI

Washington, May 10, 1971

President Nixon has carefully studied the message of April 21, 1971, from Premier Chou En-lai conveyed through the courtesy of President Yahya Khan. President Nixon agrees that direct high-level negotiations are necessary to resolve the issues dividing the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. Because of the importance he attaches to normalizing relations between our two countries, President Nixon is prepared to accept the suggestion of Premier Chou En-lai that he visit Peking for direct conversations with the leaders of the People's Republic of China. At such a meeting each side would be free to raise the issue of principal concern to it.

In order to prepare the visit by President Nixon and to establish reliable contact with the leaders of the Chinese People's Republic, President Nixon proposes a preliminary secret meeting between his Assistant for National Security Affairs, Dr. Kissinger, and Premier Chou En-lai or another appropriate high-level Chinese official. Dr. Kissinger would be prepared to attend such a meeting on Chinese soil preferably at some location within convenient flying distance from Pakistan to be suggested by the People's Republic of China. Dr. Kissinger would be authorized to discuss the circumstances which would make a visit by President Nixon most useful, the agenda of such a meeting, the time of such a visit and to begin a preliminary exchange of views on all subjects of mutual interest. If it should be thought desirable that a special emissary come to Peking publicly between the secret visit to the People's Republic of China of Dr. Kissinger and the arrival of President Nixon, Dr. Kissinger will be authorized to arrange it. It is anticipated that the visit of President Nixon to Peking could be announced within a short time of the secret meeting between Dr. Kissinger and Premier Chou En-lai. Dr. Kissinger will be prepared to come from June 15 onward.

It is proposed that the precise details of Dr. Kissinger's trip including location, duration of stay, communication and similar matters be discussed through the good offices of President Yahya Khan. For secrecy, it is essential that no other channel be used. It is also understood that this first meeting between Dr. Kissinger and high officials of the People's Republic of China be strictly secret.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT'S FILE

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Washington, July 1, 1971

SUBJECT: Meeting Between President, Dr. Kissinger
and General Haig, Thursday, July 1, Oval Office

... The President next turned to Dr. Kissinger's proposals for discussion with representatives of the People's Republic of China during his forthcoming side visit to Peking. The President stated that the communiqué resulting from the visit should not include names and that in his view the President noted that the position which Dr. Kissinger proposed to take was not strong enough, that it was far too forthcoming and that he wished him not to indicate a willingness to abandon much of our support for Taiwan until it was necessary to do so.

The President emphasized that the issue of "one China vs. two Chinas" should be mentioned only once in the conversation rather than threaded throughout it as in the present text. He stated that with respect to United Nations representation Dr. Kissinger should specifically ask for the Chinese viewpoint. Concerning the section on Vietnam the President suggested that it be reduced in length and tightened considerably.

The President stated that during the discussions he felt it was important for Dr. Kissinger to emphasize more clearly to the Chinese the threat of Japan's future orientation. He pointed out that Dr. Kissinger should state that the Chinese must recognize that a number of nations are concerned about Asia, particularly the role of Japan in the event the United States leaves. In the case of Japan it is obvious that they have both the ability, resources, and know-how to rebuild their military in a precipitous fashion and that a total disengagement of the United States or a misapplication of forces in the area could result in a resurgent Japanese bellicosity with considerable danger for all.

The President stated that he wanted a somewhat heavier emphasis on the Soviet threat. Dr. Kissinger replied that this issue would have to be handled gingerly and that the Chinese might report what was said to the Soviets. The President agreed but stated that the way to handle this was to refer to facts rather than U.S. interpretation of these facts. For example he should tell the Chinese that we note that there are more Soviet divisions on the Chinese border than those arrayed against all of the NATO pact countries. He should refer to this as reports in the press.

The President summarized by stating that in his discussions with the Chinese Dr. Kissinger should build on three fears: (1) fears of what the President might do in the event of continued stalemate in the South Vietnam war; (2) the fear of a resurgent and militaristic Japan; and (3) the fear of the Soviet threat on their flank.

The President stated that prior to a summit certain accomplishments should be arrived at between the two governments. **First**, the release of all U.S. POWs held in China. **Second**, at least some token shipments of U.S. grain to Communist China. **Third**, some progress on the Vietnam war issue. **Four**, we might conclude, as the outcome of a summit, the establishment of a hotline between the two governments and some kind of agreement on the issue of accidental nuclear war.

Finally the President stated Dr. Kissinger should make it very clear to the Chinese that we expected them to institute a severe limit on political visitors prior to any summit with President Nixon. Following that summit visits of any kind would, of course, be authorized.

The President then returned to the subject of Taiwan and the treatment of it in the discussions with the Chinese. He told Dr. Kissinger to tone down any reference to the fact that Vice President Agnew and Secretary Laird had cancelled their trips. He emphasized that the discussions with the Chinese cannot look like a sellout of Taiwan. He instructed Dr. Kissinger not to open up with a discussion on what we've done and the fact that we will not need troops there forever, but rather to restructure that point by emphasizing that the Nixon Doctrine provides for help to those nations who help themselves and thus it will not be essential for our military presence to remain in some areas forever. The President stated that the overall statement with respect to Taiwan should be somewhat more enigmatic.

The President asked Dr. Kissinger not to mention the Truman 1950 statement with which he personally did not agree. In sum, the President asked him to review the entire discussion of the Taiwan issue so that we would not appear to be dumping on our friends and so that we would be somewhat more mysterious about our overall willingness to make concessions in this area.

With respect to future meeting places between the two governments, President Nixon stated that he preferred London where communications would be secure and where the size of the city added to the kind of security that would be necessary. He instructed Dr. Kissinger to refer to London as our first choice. Warsaw would be best for diplomatic contacts, but above all, Ottawa would be unacceptable to the President.

Again concerning Taiwan the President made the point that six thousand of our troops in Taiwan were directly related to our conduct of the war in South Vietnam so that as that issue was solved the requirement for these troops would disappear.

The President stated that the section on Korea was exceptionally well done. . . .

FROM: DR. KISSINGER **5**
TO: PRESIDENT NIXON

San Clemente, CA, July 14, 1971

Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only.

SUBJECT: My Talks with Chou En-lai

Introduction

My two-day visit to Peking resulted in the most searching, sweeping and significant discussions I have ever had in government. I spent seventeen hours in meetings and informal conversation with Chou Enlai, flanked by Marshal Yeh Chien-ying, member of the Politburo and of the Military Commission; Huang Hua, the new Chinese Ambassador in Ottawa; and Chang Wen-chin, head of the West European and American Department in the Foreign Ministry. Another four hours was spent with Huang and Chang, mostly on drafting a communiqué. These meetings brought about a summit meeting between you and Mao Tse-tung, covered all major issues between our two countries at considerable length and with great candor, and may well have marked a major new departure in international relations.

It is extremely difficult to capture in a memorandum the essence of this experience. Simply giving you a straightforward account of the highlights of our talks, potentially momentous as they were, would do violence to an event so shaped by the atmosphere and the ebb and flow of our encounter, or to the Chinese behavior, so dependent on nuances and style. Thus, this memorandum will sketch the overall sequence of events and philosophic framework, as well as the substance of our exchanges. For the intangibles are crucial and we must understand them if we are to take advantage of the opportunities we now have, deal effectively with these tough, idealistic, fanatical, single-minded and remarkable people, and thus transform the very framework of global relationships. . . .

Conclusion

I am frank to say that this visit was a very moving experience. The historic aspects of the occasion; the warmth and dignity of the Chinese; the splendor of the Forbidden City, Chinese history and culture; the heroic stature of Chou En-lai; and the intensity and sweep of our talks combined to make an indelible impression on me and my colleagues.

These forty-eight hours, and my extensive discussions with Chou in particular, had all the flavor, texture, variety and delicacy of a Chinese banquet. Prepared from the long sweep of tradition and culture, meticulously cooked by hands of experience, and served in splendidly simple surroundings, our feast consisted of

many courses, some sweet and some sour, all interrelated and forming a coherent whole. It was a total experience, and one went away, as after all good Chinese meals, very satisfied but not at all satiated.

We have laid the groundwork for you and Mao to turn a page in history. But we should have no illusions about the future. Profound differences and years of isolation yawn between us and the Chinese. They will be tough before and during the summit on the question of Taiwan and other major issues. And they will prove implacable foes if our relations turn sour. My assessment of these people is that they are deeply ideological, close to fanatic in the intensity of their beliefs. At the same time they display an inward security that allows them, within the framework of their principles, to be meticulous and reliable in dealing with others.

Furthermore, the process we have now started will send enormous shock waves around the world. It may panic the Soviet Union into sharp hostility. It could shake Japan loose from its heavily American moorings. It will cause a violent upheaval in Taiwan. It will have major impact on our other Asian allies, such as Korea and Thailand. It will increase the already substantial hostility in India. Some quarters may seek to sabotage the summit over the coming months.

However, we were well aware of these risks when we embarked on this course. We were aware too that the alternative was unacceptable— continued isolation from one-quarter of the world's most talented people and a country rich in past achievements and future potential.

And even the risks can be managed and turned to our advantage if we maintain steady nerves and pursue our policies responsibly. With the Soviet Union we will have to make clear the continued priorities we attach to our concrete negotiations with them. Just as we will not collude with them against China, so we have no intention of colluding with China against them. If carefully managed, our new China policy could have a longer term beneficial impact on Moscow.

With Japan our task will be to make clear that we are not shifting our allegiance in Asia from her to China. On Taiwan we can hope for little more than damage limitation by reaffirming our diplomatic relations and mutual defense treaty even while it becomes evident that we foresee a political evolution over the coming years. With our other Asian allies we will need to stress both our continued bonds and our hope that reconciliation between us and the Chinese will serve the cause of regional peace. And in India, after the initial shock, our China moves might produce a more healthy relationship.

For Asia and for the world we need to demonstrate that we are enlarging the scope of our diplomacy in a way that, far from harming the interests of other countries, should instead prove helpful to them.

Our dealings, both with the Chinese and others, will require reliability, precision, finesse. If we can master this process, we will have made a revolution.

PRESIDENT NIXON ADDRESSES THE NATION 6

Washington, July 15, 1971

I have requested this television time tonight to announce a major development in our efforts to build a lasting peace in the world.

As I have pointed out on a number of occasions over the past three years, there can be no stable peace and enduring peace without the participation of the People's Republic of China and its 750 million people. That is why I have undertaken initiatives in several areas to open the door for more normal relations between our two countries.

In pursuance of that goal, I sent Dr. Kissinger, my assistant for national security affairs, to Peking during his recent world tour for the purpose of having talks with Premier Chou En-lai.

The announcement I shall now read is being issued simultaneously in Peking and in the United States:

"Premier Chou En-lai and Dr. Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's assistant for national security affairs, held talks in Peking from July 9 to 11, 1971. Knowing of President Nixon's expressed desire to visit the People's Republic of China, Premier Chou En-lai on behalf of the government of the People's Republic of China has extended an invitation to President Nixon to visit China at an appropriate date before May, 1972.

President Nixon has accepted the invitation with pleasure.

The meeting between the leaders of China and the United States is to seek the normalization of relations between the two countries and also to exchange views on questions of concern to the two sides."

In anticipation of the inevitable speculation which will follow this announcement, I want to put our policy in the clearest possible context. Our action in seeking a new relationship with the People's Republic of China will not be at the expense of our old friends.

It is not directed against any other nation. We seek friendly relations with all nations. Any nation can be our friend without being any other nation's enemy.

I have taken this action because of my profound conviction that all nations will gain from a reduction of tensions and a better relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

It is in this spirit that I will undertake what I deeply hope will become a journey for peace, peace not just for our generation but for future generations on this earth we share together.

Thank you and good night.

FROM: PRESIDENT NIXON 

TO: DR. KISSINGER

Washington, July 19, 1971

One effective line you could use in your talks with the press is how RN is uniquely prepared for this meeting and how ironically in many ways he has similar character characteristics and background to Chou. I am just listing a few of the items that might be emphasized.

- (1) Strong convictions.
- (2) Came up through adversity.
- (3) At his best in a crisis. Cool. Unflappable.
- (4) A tough bold strong leader. Willing to take chances where necessary.
- (5) A man who takes the long view, never being concerned about tomorrow's headlines but about how the policy will look years from now.
- (6) A man with a philosophical turn of mind.
- (7) A man who works without notes—in meetings with 73 heads of state and heads of government RN has had hours of conversation without any notes. When he met with Khrushchev in 1959 in the seven hour luncheon at the dacha, neither he nor Khrushchev had a note and yet discussed matters of the greatest consequences in covering many areas.

(8) A man who knows Asia and has made a particular point of traveling in Asia and studying Asia.

(9) A man who in terms of his personal style is very strong and very tough where necessary—steely but who is subtle and appears almost gentle. The tougher his position usually, the lower his voice. You could point out that most of these attributes are ones that you also saw in Chou En-lai.

As a matter of fact, one of the ways that you could subtly get this across is to describe Chou En-lai and to go into how RN's personal characteristics are somewhat similar.